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# Implementation of the measures regarding information and communications

## Report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report is submitted to the Committee on Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/70 B of 10 December 1997, in which the Assembly asked me to report to the Committee on the implementation of the measures regarding information and communications approved by the Assembly.

In my report on questions relating to information (A/52/455), I had stated that I concurred with the conceptual approach and the thrust of the recommendations of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities. In appointing an Under-Secretary-General to lead the Department of Public Information, I am underscoring the importance that I attach to the role of communications, not as a support function but as an integral part of the substantive programme of the United Nations. My objective is to ensure that a communications dimension is integrated into the work of all departments of the Organization, turning the United Nations into an effective modern communications-oriented organization.

As a first step, the present report focuses on elaborating the necessary conceptual framework for the policies that will characterize the new orientation and identify its major strategic objectives and functional priorities. Included in these would be the need to develop a culture of communications throughout the Organization; the continued strengthening of its capacity to use the latest information technologies to reach audiences around the globe; to project the Organization's unique role in meeting the peace, development and human

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rights objectives of the international community as mandated by the appropriate intergovernmental bodies; to strengthen further the Department's capacity to work closely with other parts of the Organization on communications and information policies for promotion of substantive and thematic programmes; and to strengthen the Organization's capacity to communicate at the country and regional levels.

A Strategic Communications Planning Group will be established in the Department to advise the Under-Secretary-General on critical issues that have a direct bearing on the image of the Organization. It will be supported by a unit in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General, to be staffed by redeployment of existing resources.

The importance of the new electronic medium, the Internet, which joins the three existing media to open new avenues for communications, has been fully recognized by the Department of Public Information. It is the department in the Secretariat responsible for coordinating and managing the United Nations home page and for its public information content. To underscore the central role that the fourth medium will play in the communications activities of the Department, the Under-Secretary-General is giving careful consideration to the most appropriate organizational arrangements for that function. In the meantime, he will take direct charge of the Information Technology Section, which is already established in his Office, and will strengthen its leadership by redeploying a post at the Chief of Service level to that Section from within the existing resources in the budget of the Department of Public Information for the biennium 1998-1999. Furthermore, Internet training will be provided to staff in all divisions of the Department, to ensure that management of the home page is complemented by content concerning specific information programmes.

A feasibility study covering technical, financial, programming and managerial implications of the development of a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity has been prepared with the assistance of a major national broadcasting organization. The recommendations of the study are being considered by the Department. At the same time, the production of authoritative, relevant and timely publications will remain at the centre of the Department's outreach efforts as a major readership survey carried out in the second half of 1997 confirmed the continued relevance of such print materials to redisseminators throughout the world. Accordingly, the Department will continue the revitalization of its more demand-driven publication programme to ensure the production of high-quality, attractive material that demonstrates the relevance and centrality of the United Nations system to people's everyday lives.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library is taking steps to become a library without walls whose foundation is technical innovation. To achieve that objective and to meet the users' need for remote access to full text information, it is designing and implementing a virtual library where members of the United Nations community will be able to access a wealth of information online.

Building partnerships with important information redisseminators of information – the media, non-governmental organizations, business organizations and educational institutions – will be a key feature of the new orientation of communications policies. Effective outreach to such partners will ensure optimum use of the limited resources available to the Department.

The message of the United Nations must be carried beyond the countries where United Nations system headquarters are located. United Nations information centres and services should be made more effective. Experience of integration of some centres with offices of resident coordinators of the United Nations system has revealed substantial problems, as noted by the Secretary-General's Task Force on Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities in its report. The recommendations of the Task Force are being considered with a view to developing proposals as soon as possible, within the spirit of the emphasis on common premises, common services and common programmes in a single "United Nations House" in each country.

All reorientation measures are to be effected within the existing resources allocated for the biennium 1998-1999, through flexible reallocation where necessary and feasible.

# I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 52/70 B of 10 December 1997, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twentieth session, and to the Assembly at its fifty-third session, on United Nations public information activities and on the implementation of the measures regarding information and communications approved by the Assembly. The present report is submitted to the Committee on Information in accordance with the provisions of resolution 52/70 B.

2. It may be recalled that in my report of 10 October 1997 on questions relating to information (A/52/455), as in my proposals for the reform of the United Nations of 14 July 1997 (see A/52/950) and in a conference room paper circulated to the Committee on Information during its resumed nineteenth session, held in September 1997 (A/AC.198/1997/CRP.2), I concurred with the conceptual approach and the thrust of the recommendations adopted by the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities in its report entitled "Global vision, local voice: a strategic communications programme for the United Nations" (see A/AC.198/1997/CRP.1). Among the recommendations, I would like in particular to draw the Committee's attention to the appointment of an Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information to head the Department. In making the appointment of Mr. Kensaku Hogen at this level, I am underscoring the importance that I attach to the role of communications as an integral part of the substantive programme of the United Nations and not as a support function. My objective is to ensure that a communications dimension is integrated into the work of all departments of the Organization, turning the United Nations into an effective modern communications-oriented organization.

3. The new Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information assumed his responsibilities on 16 March 1998. He immediately initiated a careful study of the principal recommendations of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, as well as of all the available information emanating from subsequent comprehensive staff-management consultations carried out within the Department. While it is too soon to elaborate any detailed blueprint at the present early stage, the work already done makes it possible to identify the major strategic objectives and functional priorities that should characterize the new orientation of the Organization's communications and information policies. So the present report focuses, as a first step, on elaborating the necessary conceptual framework for such policies.

# II. Background

4. There is widespread agreement that the future of the United Nations depends on the ability to project its centrality in meeting the challenges that gather as we approach the next century. I have underlined this message from the first day of my tenure, emphasizing the key role that communications must play in asserting the continuing relevance of the United Nations mission in the political, developmental and financial environment that is shaping the thinking for the new millennium.

5. The overall objective of the communications and information function is to inform the public about the work of the United Nations in order to help build broad-based global support for the Organization. This support will depend on how effectively the Organization is perceived to deal with the challenges it faces. For the Department of Public Information, the major challenge will be its ability to reflect effectively and in a timely manner the activities, successes and performance of the Organization.

6. Any new operational strategy would need to build on the experience and recognized achievements of the current Department in dealing with communications in a multilateral, multicultural environment. It would follow on the considerable changes that the Department has undergone in the last few years, as the Task Force reported. It would also recognize the need to ensure acceptance by Member States of the overall strategic objectives and their approval of the need for a flexible approach to carrying out the multiple mandates that the Department is required to implement.

# III. A new orientation

7. The dimensions of the new orientation of the Department of Public Information and indeed the Organization's communications and information policies would be determined and gain strength from the priority that I assign to those functions in the work of the Organization, the views of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities and those emerging from the staff and management consultations within the Department. The broad objectives of the new orientation may be defined as follows:

(a) To place the communications and information functions at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization, given their central role in building public and political support for the United Nations;

(b) To help develop a culture of communications throughout the Organization, in order to communicate, in cooperation with the programmes, funds and specialized agencies, the direct relevance of every aspect of its work to the daily lives and concerns of people everywhere;

(c) To project the Organization as an open, transparent and public institution that has the capacity to meet the principal peace, development and human rights objectives enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(d) To strengthen the Organization's ability to communicate at the country and regional levels – the levels at which public opinion is created – and to ensure that the global messages of the United Nations both reflect and are tailored to national orientations;

(e) To continue to strengthen the Organization's capacity to use the latest information technologies to reach audiences around the globe;

(f) To follow closely the strategic guidance and direction of the General Assembly on the implementation of mandates, while accepting much greater responsibility for formulation of specific programmes designed to meet mandated goals;

(g) To develop and strengthen the capacity to deploy given resources flexibly to meet exigent challenges, while maintaining the commitment to mandated priorities;

(h) To strengthen further the Department's capacity to work together with other parts of the Organization to design and implement communication and information strategies for their substantive and thematic objectives.

## IV. Structural implications

8. In my report to the General Assembly on questions relating to information (A/52/455), I had indicated that the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information would be asked to ensure that the programmes and instruments for meeting the above objectives are put into place on a strictly professional and cost-effective basis. This will be achieved by building on the recognized strengths of the Department, consolidating those activities which have been effective, adopting innovative and proactive approaches to communications, sharpening the focus on specific themes, setting priorities and streamlining programmes and resources. As initial steps in designing structures that would strengthen the Department's capacity to focus on the new orientation, the following paragraphs will outline the measures that are being considered.

## V. Strategic Communications Planning Group

9. To enable the Head of the Department to implement an integrated and strategically directed communications programme, a Strategic Communications Planning Group will be established in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General. The Group's principal function will be to advise him on the critical, cross-cutting issues that have a direct bearing on the image of the Organization. The Group will consist of the Directors and Chiefs of Service within the Department. It would be supported by a unit that would be established by redeployment of existing resources.

10. The Group will provide the Under-Secretary-General with advice on:

(a) Overall policy formulation, coordination, priority-setting and liaison with offices, departments and programmes of the Secretariat and the United Nations system;

(b) Overseeing the deployment of communications technology, including the use of the Internet;

(c) Formulation of multidimensional, multimedia and, as necessary, multi-agency plans for campaigns on themes of priority concern, as mandated by the United Nations and, when required, the United Nations system;

(d) Identification of potential areas of criticism or misinformation and mobilization of inter-divisional and inter-departmental resources to correct and counter them by what may be called "pre-emptive communications" and, beyond that, by the encouragement of "preventive journalism";

(e) Serving as a focal point for programme feedback and evaluation;

(f) Liaison with the General Assembly and its Main Committees, with Secretariat departments and with entities of the United Nations system;

(g) Preparation, in cooperation with the Office of Human Resources Management, of communications training and refresher course programmes for upgrading skills of all staff.

## VI. The Internet

11. New breakthroughs in technology have consistently reshaped and immensely enhanced the significance of the communications and information functions within States and in the international community over many decades. Improvements in the technology of printing, the advent of radio broadcasting and then of television transformed the role of information media at each stage. Thus, throughout this century, we have seen how a single dominant medium became two, and then three principal media, each growing from strength to strength at the same time. We are now entering the age of a fourth medium, the Internet, and if history is any guide, we are likely to see it transforming and enhancing dramatically the significance of communications and information, not only to the intercourse of States and national and international elites, but to the daily lives of individuals in all corners of the globe.

12. Among the many distinguishing qualities of the Internet is its capacity to act as a multimedia channel. This quality, in particular, portends the placing of the Internet as one of the cornerstones of the communications strategies of the future. The intensely competitive environment for media access and coverage, the necessity for speedy communications, the need to respond almost instantaneously to breaking news, the exponential growth in the scope and depth of reach of this new medium, all make it imperative that the United Nations, and in particular the Department of Public Information, embrace it as a central communications system and delivery vehicle for its outreach. At the same time, the other three media will continue to receive high priority and to ensure outreach to all countries, especially those where the new technologies will take time to take hold.

13. Within its responsibility for maintaining and coordinating the United Nations home page and for its public information content, the Department will continue to enhance its capacity to use the new medium to its full potential. Print, radio and video production should be geared to make optimum use of its multimedia capacity. In view of all these considerations, the Under-Secretary-General will take direct charge of the Department's responsibilities for the Internet. He will redeploy the necessary resources to the Information Technology Section already established in his Office and strengthen its leadership by redeploying a post at the Chief of Service level to that Section from within the existing resources in the budget of the Department of Public Information for the biennium 1998-1999, to enable the Section to work closely with all the divisions in the Department and also with all departments and offices of the Secretariat, and take the lead in the system-wide development of the medium. The principal responsibility of the Department will be to ensure that the public information and communications content of the United Nations presence on the Internet is maintained, enhanced and kept abreast of all the latest developments in this new and expanding medium. An Internet training programme for staff in all divisions of the Department should be established to ensure that the responsibilities of the centrally located Information Technology Section for the coordination and management of the home page are complemented by appropriate information content from the divisions dealing with specific programmes. This will apply to the capacity to produce substantial print content designed for Internet use, as well as content in the shape of radio and television programmes.

## VII. Promotion of thematic mandates

14. Instrumental to the need for a communications culture throughout the Organization is the crucial role of the Department of Public Information in working closely with substantive departments to help improve the communications content of their activities. Such cooperation should take the form of organic links to ensure a continuous exchange of information between those departments and the Department of Public Information. The Department will seek to strengthen its existing working arrangements with the Department for Peacekeeping Operations and work to develop similar arrangements with other departments, especially with the Department for Economic and Social Affairs, keeping in view the very high priority attached to publicity campaigns for United Nations activities in the economic and social field. The Department will build on the very valuable experience gained in promotional activities related to the recent cycle of global conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly on issues of economic and social development. The 1998 priority programmes are related to the special session of the General Assembly on international drug control issues, the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court as well as the observance of the fiftieth anniversaries of United Nations peacekeeping and of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Above all, the Department will work closely with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to ensure the formulation and dissemination of a single coherent message about the work and the priorities of the Organization.

## VIII. News gathering and dissemination

15. The ability of the United Nations to communicate its message effectively will depend largely on how well it packages and presents its operations to the mass media in a timely and news-oriented manner. The development of a more effective news-gathering and delivery system is therefore an immediate priority, and it will be built around the concept of a multimedia central news desk with stronger news-gathering and timely distribution capacity tied to the global daily news cycle. A starting point will be the development of the Daily Highlights into a news service, using the Internet and other channels of rapid communication as delivery mechanisms. The system will include a quick response component geared toward producing and disseminating clear, timely and coherent material on breaking stories, as well as countering misinformation in the various media. This capacity will be achieved through pooling of existing resources, elimination of duplication and, where necessary, establishment of task forces drawing on skills available within the Department.

## IX. United Nations radio

16. The development of a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity for direct communication with United Nations constituencies is a priority project for the Department, to be carried out within the existing resources. This will allow for a direct, far-reaching and cost-effective information delivery mechanism that will be immediately available for the entire United Nations system and the leadership of the Organization, in particular in times of crisis. The system will also support the public information needs of peacekeeping operations and humanitarian emergency situations, especially at the start-up stage. The Department has already taken the following two steps in this context:

(a) In response to the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and consistent with the objectives of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, a feasibility study covering the technical, financial, programming and managerial implications of the development of a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity has been prepared in cooperation with a major national broadcaster. The study elaborates on the building of a radio broadcasting capacity both for the purposes of peacekeeping operations and humanitarian situations, as well as for the public information needs of the United Nations and its common system. The recommendations of the study are being considered by the Department;

(b) This summer, the Department of Public Information is preparing to launch a pilot project for a direct radio broadcasting schedule that will target audiences in selected regions in Africa and Asia. By adopting the Internet as a fast-growing information delivery technology, in March 1998 the Department started to post audio files of daily radio news bulletins, in English and in French, on the United Nations website.

## X. Partnerships with information redisseminators

17. Building partnerships – both globally and within the Secretariat and the United Nations system – is one of the central priorities of the Department, since the Organization does not have the necessary resources to reach all people all over the world directly. Forging partnerships at the Headquarters and field levels will be instrumental to the effective delivery of United Nations messages and to building an informed and supportive constituency. In short, the Department has to work in partnership with information redisseminators.

18. Stronger working links with non-governmental organizations are being developed, both at Headquarters and in the field. Non-governmental organizations and other representatives of civil society, including the business community, are an important element in enhancing the resource requirements of field communications offices in particular. Improved facilities to enable non-governmental organizations to interact among themselves and with the Department are to be a major element in the new orientation of communication activities. Better briefing facilities, greater encouragement for joint activities at Headquarters and in the field constitute a central feature. Continuous efforts will be made to extend the associate relationship with the Department to larger numbers of non-governmental organizations from all parts of the world, as they are at the core of activity in support of the United Nations in civil society worldwide. The United Nations welcomes them as very valuable partners in this endeavour.

19. The information media are the principal redisseminators of United Nations information to the public. Partnerships with media organizations are an essential focus of the new orientation of communication policies. First and foremost is the Department's partnership with the distinguished corps of resident correspondents at the United

Nations - our partners in the United Nations Correspondents' Association. Improvement of working conditions and facilities for access to news for media representatives will be a high priority for the Department. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information will establish a dialogue on all aspects of such questions with the leadership of the United Nations Correspondents' Association on a continuous basis, thereby reinforcing the partnership.

20. Partnerships with radio and television broadcasters have been a significant feature of the Department's activities. For instance, despite limited resources, small United Nations television teams have often been the first in the field in difficult situations, providing coverage that many of the major media networks have been able to use. "UN in Action" continues to be a regular feature on the Cable News Network's international broadcasts. The new orientation of communication policies will encourage and foster such partnerships with media organizations, both large and small.

21. The Department's outreach to educational institutions has been a very valuable asset that needs to be nurtured and strengthened. Such outreach should take place at all levels, ranging from elementary school to institutions of higher learning, from young students to school teachers, graduate students and professors. Model United Nations organizations should be encouraged to spread to all countries and United Nations information centres have a special role in this context. Programmes such as the CyberSchoolBus and others, taking advantage of new information technologies, should be developed on a continuous basis. Programmes for student groups or educational institutions should be accorded a high priority. Indeed, educational institutions are our most effective redisseminators of information to future generations. Many educational institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations and business organizations, are eager to interact with United Nations representatives to improve their knowledge of the work of the United Nations. In this regard, I would encourage senior officials to make every effort to devote time to speaking engagements and encourage their staff to do so. Outreach is of central importance and the personal touch, where possible, is of immense value. There is also a very important role in this context for representatives of Member States in New York – a role we would welcome.

## XI. Dag Hammarskjöld Library

22. In accordance with the view outlined in the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, the direction of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is towards a library without walls whose foundation is technical innovation. The Library, recognizing the users' need for remote access to full-text information, is designing and implementing a virtual library where members of the United Nations community will be able to identify material in any collection and ask for a loan/inter-library loan or find and download articles from journals. Increasing the provision of online information services will assist in achieving that goal. The Internet/Intranet, the interface with the optical disc system and the digitization of the archival collection of United Nations documents for uploading to the optical disc system/United Nations home page, are but a few of the projects leading to the virtual library of the future and implementation of provisions of resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997.

## XII. Publications

23. Despite the impact of new developments in the electronic and visual communications media, authoritative, relevant and timely publications continue to influence significantly key sectors of public opinion, and hence remain at the centre of the Department's outreach efforts. A major readership survey carried out in the second half of 1997 confirmed the importance of United Nations print materials to its audience of redisseminators throughout the world. The Department will continue the revitalization of its more demand-driven publication programme to ensure the production of high-quality, attractive material that demonstrates the relevance and centrality of the United Nations system to people's everyday lives.

24. The reach of United Nations information activities is being significantly broadened through increased use of the Internet, with many new publications being placed on the Web. While access to the Internet remains very restricted in many parts of the world, the readership survey nevertheless demonstrated that many principal redisseminators in such countries are making use of the Internet to get up-to-date material on the United Nations.

## XIII. Feedback and evaluation

25. The Department's communication efforts can only be assured of success if there is an effective mechanism within each division to provide consistent feedback on the impact and relevance of its work. The Strategic Communications

Planning Group will provide professional assistance and coordinate the evaluation efforts at the departmental level, including integrating feedback from field communications offices. This professional evaluation, as opposed to institutional reporting, will provide a vital input into the focusing of the Department's work programme, and should be seen as a continuous feature of its work.

## XIV. Communications and information in the field

26. Consistent with the special emphasis that I would like to place on the integration of communications and information in all aspects of the work of the Organization, I believe that the message of the United Nations must be projected beyond the countries where the United Nations system headquarters are located. The need for effective information capacity for the United Nations around the globe is imperative. Reorientation measures in the field must therefore focus on use of the limited available resources to the greatest effect. A key facet of such measures will therefore be the strengthening of the Organization's ability to communicate at the country and regional levels. The United Nations information centres and services have a key role to play in this context.

27. In its resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue the integration exercise with field offices of UNDP in a cost-effective manner and, whenever feasible, on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country and ensuring that the information functions and the autonomy of the information centres are not adversely affected and to report thereon to it at its fifty-third session.

28. The Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities noted the substantial problems that some integrated information centres had encountered. It has also recommended flexible country-level models for the centres, combined with a unified regional structure and Headquarters oversight – a small number of "regional hubs" to back up the country-level centres. Added to this are some very useful pointers for improvement of the professional expertise of the staff and the updating of essential communications equipment. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information is studying the various recommendations with a view to developing proposals as soon as possible. The debate at the twentieth session of the Committee on Information on this subject will be a very important part of the considerations that he will take into account.

## XV. Enhancing the Department's skill base

29. The Department will take full advantage of the training programmes available, as well as institute new ones, to ensure that its staff is fully equipped to meet the challenge of communicating the United Nations message. This involves not only technical expertise, such as computer or Internet skills, but also expertise in oral and written presentation, to ensure that all staff can communicate clearly and effectively with the Department's audiences. In addition, the Department will make full use of refresher courses, seminars and professional conferences and workshops to ensure that its staff is kept fully abreast with the latest developments in the communications field. The Strategic Communications Planning Group can play an important role in advising divisions in this regard.

30. The present report is a first important step toward the elaboration of a comprehensive plan and strategy that I will shortly be putting forward in the context of the reorientation of the Department's information and communications activities. Further elaboration of the concepts put forward will, of course, be strongly influenced by the views of the Committee on Information.